

FACT SHEET:

Medications for type 2 diabetes

When you are first diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, you may not need to take medication. Over time, you may need glucose-lowering medication to help keep blood glucose levels in the target range and to reduce the risk of developing diabetes-related complications. These medications may be in the form of tablets or injectable medications. The type and dose of medication you take will continue to change with your needs. Your doctor will review the medications you are taking regularly to ensure you receive the best care possible.

What medications are available to help manage type 2 diabetes?

There are several different groups of medication that can be used to help manage type 2 diabetes. They are grouped together based on how they work in your body. While many of these medications are available as a tablet, some are taken as an injection. Your doctor or diabetes nurse practitioner will prescribe a treatment plan suitable for you.

Sometimes people might need to take more than one medication to manage their blood glucose levels. Your doctor or diabetes nurse practitioner may also prescribe medications that will protect your heart and kidneys, which are at risk of diabetes-related damage.

Starting a new diabetes medication

When starting a new medication, your doctor or diabetes nurse practitioner may ask you to begin monitoring your blood glucose levels at home, if you are not doing this already. They will use this information at your follow-up appointment to help decide if your medication or dose needs to change.

When starting a new medication, it is important to talk to your doctor or diabetes nurse practitioner about:

- what time to take it
- how the medication works
- how much to take, or dosage levels
- when to take it – before, with or after food
- how to take it – can tablets be crushed, split or swallowed whole

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- what to do if you forget to take it
- any side effects you need to know about
- whether you should continue or stop taking the medication if you are unwell
- how to store the medication
- whether the medication can cause low blood glucose levels (also known as hypoglycaemia or hypo)
- whether it is suitable to take with other medications you are having or with complimentary medications/supplements/over the counter medicines you are currently using.

Everyone's body reacts a little differently to medications. Take note of any unusual symptoms or side effects you might experience when starting a new medication or changing the type or dose. Make an appointment to see your doctor or diabetes nurse practitioner to let them know you are experiencing unusual symptoms or side effects so they can change your dose or even swap medication types. The goal is to find the treatment that works best for you.

Looking after your type 2 diabetes is important for good health and for reducing the risk of diabetes-related complications, such as damage to the eyes, kidneys, nerves, and blood vessels.

Even if you are taking medication, continuing with healthy eating and regular physical activity is essential to help manage your diabetes.



Complementary or alternative medicines

Taking complementary, alternative, or over-the-counter medicines may affect the diabetes medications you are taking.

Complementary and alternative treatments can take the form of foods, herbal remedies, or supplements. Although some may prove useful, others carry risk of real harm and can have adverse side effects. In some cases, they can even increase your risk of or hypos.

Always talk to your doctor or diabetes nurse practitioner **before** taking other medications. Complementary or alternative therapies **cannot replace** the medicines prescribed by your doctor or diabetes nurse practitioner.



More information and support

- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) to search for the 'Healthy food choices', 'Physical activity' and other fact sheets.
- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) to access the Ready, Set, Go -Let's move, Type 2 diabetes and me and MyDESMOND programs online and other NDSS programs and services in your state or territory, or online.
- Call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700** and ask to speak to a diabetes educator.
- Go to [healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au) to find a health service or diabetes health professional near you.
- For more information about your medication call the National Prescribing Service on the Medicine Line **1300 636 424** or go to [nps.org.au/medicine-finder](https://www.nps.org.au/medicine-finder).



Top tips

- Make a list of your medications and doses and add the reasons you are taking these. Take this list with you to all your medical appointments.
- Use the correct dose at the right time, as prescribed by your doctor or diabetes nurse practitioner.
- Read the information leaflet that comes with the medication or ask your pharmacist for the Consumer Medicines Information leaflet.
- Do not split or crush your tablets without checking with your pharmacist first, as it may change the way your medication works.
- If you drink alcohol, make sure your doctor knows, as some medications can cause alcohol-related hypos.
- If you need help remembering to take your medication, ask your pharmacist about using a dose administration aid such as a dosette box or Webster-pak[®].

Notes

The NDSS and you

Whether you have just been diagnosed with diabetes, or have been living with diabetes for a while, the NDSS provides a range of support services, information, and subsidised products to help you manage your diabetes, stay healthy and live well. For access to more resources (including translated versions), or to find out more about support services, go to ndss.com.au or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**.

This information is intended as a guide only. It should not replace individual medical advice and if you have any concerns about your health or further questions, you should contact your health professional.